



# Religion in the modern world: A political outlook

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## Abstract

The purpose of the study is to uncover the specifics of the importance of religion in today's political system of Kazakhstan. The leading research methods used to address this issue include analysis, synthesis, deduction, induction, modelling, and the method of generalisation. The democratisation of political processes has led to the creation of favourable conditions for the spread and revival of religious values. Legal mechanisms have emerged to regulate state-religious relations and prevent conflicts and destructive processes detrimental to society. Religious organisations have become active participants not only in the religious sphere but also in the social, cultural, and political aspects of society. Therefore, this paper addresses current issues related to defining the role of religion in the modern world. To achieve the purpose of the study, key questions were addressed, including those related to the existing innovations in the political and religious systems, the significance of the religious aspect in public life, and the modernised principles of interaction between religious and political aspects. The main areas of the study were determined by the insufficient theoretical and methodological developments and the growing importance of the subject. There is a lack of existing research on the topic, which is justified by the conducted thorough literature review. The paper formulated its own conclusions while considering publications by other specialists in this field. The study also modelled the areas for the further development of the religious system. Materials from European experts were examined, allowing for a comprehensive consideration of the significance of religion in the political system under modern conditions. As a result of the study, key features of religion in the modern world were identified. The materials in the study have practical value and can be used in the organisational and economic support of Kazakhstan's political system.

**Keywords:** philosophy, traditionalism, sustainable development, modern spirituality, culture.

## Introduction



The relevance of this study is associated with the fact that due to radical changes in Kazakhstan's political system, religious organisations have gained the opportunity to interact not only with the state but also with political parties and individual politicians. They support or condemn the position of specific political forces on particular issues, shaping the worldview, social, and political values of believers. Consequently, religious communities have acquired the opportunity to influence the political process in the country (Aimukhambetov et al., 2019). The increased role of religious organisations in Kazakhstan is also linked to a systemic crisis, a crisis affecting all spheres of society's activities. The government's inability to address current and strategic challenges and ensure sustainable development has led to social apathy and citizens' mistrust of the official authorities.

It is essential to mention that in the modern academic space, there is a series of studies that describe the close interrelation between the political and religious systems. Currently, religion is strengthening its specific position in the world. Furthermore, one can even speak of its revival. In recent years, religion in the Republic of Kazakhstan has become a key criterion for spiritual revival and the enhancement of moral values in society. In the context of globalisation, the turn to religion and its institutions is considered a natural process, as argued by Schavrina (2019). This is because a large number of people perceive religious principles as guiding lights for the revival of morality. Religion has always contributed to society's adaptation to changing external conditions, as suggested by Martyshyn (2019). It is worth noting that this ensured the stability of existing political systems. However, in emerging situations, there was inevitably a politicisation of the religious system and a sacralisation of politics.

In contemporary society, a process of secularisation is taking place. It is characterised by the transformation of religious institutions into unique marketing agencies, and religious traditions become consumers of specific products. To effectively implement themselves in the new religious market, traditional institutions need to rationalise their structure (Dodonova & Dodonov, 2024). Religion in the modern world is an integral part of the globalisation process, which unfolds unevenly. The collapse of totalitarianism, which led to the weakening of political institutions, has contributed to the emergence of several negative phenomena on the political stage, including religious-political extremism, corruption, and nationalism, as convincingly argued by Kaluha (2021). All of this has not only threatened political institutions but also the religious system, as stated by Saukh (2019). Religion and politics have always been closely integrated, as suggested by Lukpanov (2012). For this reason, changes related to religion cannot be fully assessed outside the political landscape. In turn, assessing political events without considering the influence of religion on their design and course would be inaccurate. Even in today's secularised world, the interaction between religion and political aspects has not ceased but has taken on new forms, as argued by Altaikyzy (2019). One example is the rapid politicisation of religion itself. The purpose of this study is to identify the influence of political aspects on religion in the modern world. The object of this study is the contemporary religious and political systems of Kazakhstan.

This paper is primarily based on a methodological approach that involves analysing the aspects of religion and politics in Kazakhstan within the context of integration and globalisation processes. The methodology is rooted in a systemic approach to the issue, with a fundamental examination of the criteria of the political system. For instance, the analysis method was employed in examining the concept of modernising the existing political system, considering cultural aspects. Through these methods, a comprehensive approach has been developed, which will contribute to further modernising both the political and religious systems as a whole. It is important to emphasise that this study is grounded in general scientific methods, including the systemic method and the comparative method.

The paper also applied the method of theoretical generalisation. This method was used in the detailed examination of the integration of the political and religious systems in modern conditions. The theoretical basis of this study comprises a literature review of the results of research conducted by several European experts, aimed at investigating issues related to determining the degree of



influence of political aspects on religion, which are fundamental to the political and cultural systems. Through the methods of induction, deduction, and analysis, the paper identified key characteristics of the contemporary religious system and attempted to assess the significance and effectiveness of religion for the modern political system.

## **Religion and the Modern Political Process**

Religion continues to play a significant role in contemporary society. It is noted that the number of believers of various religions has not changed significantly. One noticeable trend, for example, is that the overall number of Muslims and Christians worldwide is increasing, while the number of Christians in Western countries continues to decline (Gauthier & Martikainen, 2020). The religious factor has gained significant importance in international relations, especially since the onset of the migration crisis in Europe, ongoing armed conflicts, numerous acts of terrorism, and concerns about Islamization (Martyshyn, 2019). It is important to emphasise that all these processes are not directly related to believers. Within the framework of these events, religion becomes a tool of politics and mass media.

The influence of religion has significantly increased not only in the international aspect but also in the domestic policies of various countries, such as the United States, Poland, India, particularly in the concept of democratic processes. This is manifested both in the defence of the right to one's opinion and representation of family, moral, and societal norms, and in the desire to ensure the protection of democratic values, institutions, and mechanisms. This implies that during this period, there is an emergence of religiously motivated ideological pluralism (Beekers, 2020). In this regard, it is also important to consider another significant factor – ideological pluralism, which gradually forms due to a society with diverse views and worldviews (Gauthier & Martikainen, 2020). It is worth noting that in Kazakhstan, a generation of young people has emerged, growing up in an independent state amidst democratic transformations. It should be noted that a range of important strategic tasks lies ahead for today's youth. These reforms will be successful with a corresponding level of information, physical and intellectual potential, and education among young people, which is an important strategic resource (Schavrina, 2019).

The changes that have occurred in all sectors and areas in the Republic of Kazakhstan in recent years have led to the formation of a new concept of spirituality and religion in society. In the conditions of the modern world, for effective work with young people, a harmonious synthesis of scientific views on developing personality, the state and trends of cultural and educational systems, and religion, is necessary. In the 21st century, religion has somewhat lost its influence to govern political processes and people's daily lives; however, it remains steadfast in nurturing civic activists who play a considerable role in global ideological confrontations (Seo et al., 2021). The question of the significance of religion in political processes remains unresolved. It is essential to emphasise that this pertains not to a specific religion (such as Christianity, for example) but to the multitude of beliefs collectively. Modern specialists hypothesise that religion, despite societal secularization processes, has become the main driving force behind changes in global liberal democracy (Kaluha, 2021; Lukpanov, 2012). Nevertheless, researchers do not provide a comprehensive answer to the question of the nature of the turning point in the process of the politicisation of religion.

The beginning of the twenty-first century marked the era of post-secularity (Caputo & Hart, 2019). This process signifies that secularisation does not disappear, and religious motives and questions are re-emerging in the public sphere. The religious sphere has become the most acute topic, as it has become a specific tool for nationalist-oriented politicians. Although this is not always the case, their criticism of immigration is a priori considered xenophobia, while most churches have condemned the notion of populism. Nevertheless, many specialists state that religious identity provokes the process of populist uprising against a democratic order based on democratic principles (Altaikyzy, 2019; Gauthier & Martikainen, 2020; Beekers, 2020). In other words, religion undermines liberal democracy. Not so long ago, doubts about adapting to democracy only arose concerning religions like Islam. However, Muslim beliefs, along with Christian ones, have become significant



mechanisms of socio-political and cultural processes in Europe. The growth of their social significance began to arouse more outrage than when they were only associated with the rise of Islamic fundamentalism and extremism. Only recently have attempts been made to reevaluate Islam from the perspective of the truth of religious knowledge. Some specialists emphasise that the positive potential and dynamics of religion are far from exhausted. This is because religious communities a priori acted as a specific social buffer, a political foundation during times of upheaval, crises, and conflicts (Kaluha, 2021).

For example, among the upheavals, one can highlight the transformation of traditional society, family values, a sense of belonging during globalisation, and the inability of liberal society to build a political culture capable of uniting everyone. This incapacity results from a number of characteristics common to liberal cultures. First of all, the emphasis on personal liberties and rights can occasionally conflict with community norms and ideals, causing conflict between various social groupings. Second, liberal democracies' pluralistic character can foster diversity but also lead to worldview division and conflict that is challenging to resolve. Lastly, attempts to create a cohesive political culture might be made more difficult by the quick speed at which social and technological advancements occur in liberal countries, which can make some groups feel excluded or left behind (Doszhan, 2023; Chaika, 2024). Viewing this from a positivist perspective, the significance of religion has somewhat diminished in the modern world as transparency and security levels in society increase. However, in such a case, the position of religion can also be seen as a rejection of democratisation, which simplifies and distorts both democratic processes and religious motivations. Due to its ambivalence, religion also adapts to processes of archaisation and de-modernisation, implying the presence of authoritarian tendencies and a rejection of liberal values worldwide (Dorobanțu-Dina, 2021). It is essential to emphasise that it was precisely the democratic potential of different beliefs and religious directions that placed them at the centre of the struggle for democracy against the so-called liberal totalitarianism. Comparing religion with the concept of the “fourth wave of democratisation” allows outlining the role of believers' participation in socio-political conflicts and understanding the various positions taken by denominations and their leaders in changing the global order.

The religious factor has become most significant in socio-political conflicts during the collapse of authoritarian regimes and the disintegration of the Soviet system. On the one hand, it served as a traditional force, supporting the emergence of nation-states and their democratic transition in the post-Soviet space. On the other hand, the religious factor, in the role of a traditionalist force, came into conflict with the aggressive promotion of the idea of political correctness and the “dictatorship of minorities” (Lukpanov, 2012). If during the “third wave” of democratisation, religion was one element and object of democratisation, starting from the beginning of 2010, religion became the main driving mechanism behind the growth of conventional forces in the social, cultural, and political dimensions (Everton, 2018). Religion proved to be highly significant for the “fourth wave” of democratisation, as in most countries, there arose pressing questions about either returning to traditional values or ensuring their guaranteed protection (Kaluha, 2021). In this way, a new meaning of democracy became in demand under various circumstances, from questions of identity and sovereignty in Eastern Europe to debates between traditionalists and liberals in Western Europe and the division of American society due to different interpretations of freedom and liberalism.

The concept of the “fourth wave” of democratisation began to take shape during the socio-political conflicts that arose in the post-Soviet space (Lukpanov, 2012; Altaikyzy, 2019; Gauthier & Martikainen, 2020; Beekers, 2020). This revolution of democracy reached its peak when the key issue became identity and traditionalism in international relations, with the immigration crisis in Western countries and the period of Donald Trump's presidency in the United States (Everton, 2018; Indradevi, 2020; Solijonovna, 2020). At that time, the most oppositional force was possessed by Protestant churches, whose political reformations emerged from contentious disputes with authorities over issues of discrimination against them as “non-traditional” denominations, and education and social service. Pentecostals, Baptists, and Evangelicals organised numerous rallies worldwide to defend their rights. For example, in Ukraine, Protestant groups showed themselves as opponents of authoritarianism during the “Orange Revolution,” in Kyrgyzstan during the “Tulip



Revolution,” and in Belarus during presidential elections (Lukpanov, 2012; Saukh, 2019; Martyshyn, 2019; Kaluha, 2021). Protestants and their representatives entered the forefront of political parties and were elected to the parliaments of Ukraine and Latvia. Consequently, the social base of these processes consisted of conservative Protestants and Catholics.

The current influence of religion on politics can be considered a unique phenomenon. This is because it vividly demonstrates the absence of truth, liberal democracy, rights, and freedoms due to the pursuit of universality, which religion itself demanded in previous eras. This is precisely why representatives of the liberal order have the most emotional reaction to the struggle of the religious movement to preserve traditions and attempts to restore “moral democracy” (Ilchuk, 2024). At present, the boundaries that should not be crossed by democracies of the future are quite clearly defined. This pertains to the recognition of religion, religious culture, and identity, and the right to traditional moral values for entire societies and states. In recent years in the Republic of Kazakhstan, religion has become the key criterion for spiritual rebirth and the elevation of moral values in society. In the era of globalisation, a natural process is the turn to religion and its institutions. This is due to the fact that a significant number of people perceive religious principles as guidelines for the revival of morality and ethical practices in life per se. Religion has always contributed to society’s adaptation to changing external conditions. It is necessary to note that this ensured the stability of existing political systems.

### **Religion and Politics: Features of Interaction**

Primarily, religion assesses and explains the existing world in its unique way and regulates real relationships between people. All of this implies that religion, by showcasing the viewpoints of specific social groups or influencing various social groups, is an integral component of politics. The concept of governmental and spiritual authority was formed during the Middle Ages, reflecting social reality. This period of human development was aptly called the “Christian civilisation” when religion was the core of public life. This also pertained to politics. The doctrine of Gelasius’ “Two Swords” played a significant role in reinforcing the importance of religion (Solijonovna, 2020). According to this doctrine, God possesses two swords simultaneously – the spiritual and the secular. He entrusts the first to the church and the second to the king.

In information and explanatory work with citizens, civil education and upbringing are the main vectors, implying activities aimed at shaping and developing civic political culture in Kazakhstani society. Some experts indicate that the following components can be considered inherent in this culture (Martyshyn, 2019):

- awareness of the prospects of a liberal, democratic society;
- pronounced sense of national identity, patriotism;
- commonly accepted values and attitudes organically intertwined with the mentality, customs, and traditions of Kazakhstan;
- tolerance and tactfulness in relation to other cultures, primarily in the field of interethnic relations;
- respect for the state language and support for its development.

In the relationships between politics and religion, there are certain features associated with the specific conditions of their interaction. When examining the interactions between religion and politics, one can observe a tendency that emphasises the complexity of this issue. This primarily concerns the processes of secularisation. This phenomenon is reflected, for example, in the relations between the government and the church. It is worth noting that this phenomenon emerged relatively recently and is observed, for example, in England and the USA. To a considerable extent, this can also be observed in Kazakhstan since the late 20th century (Van der Veer, 2013). In this case, the demonstration of religiosity is a key aspect that emphasises commitment to the state and the desire to serve society. The second peculiarity in the manifestation of the relationship between religion and politics is the process of “politicisation of religion.” This phenomenon indicates the activity of beliefs



in political processes. One typical example of this phenomena is the impact of evangelical Christian organisations on US politics, especially within the Republican Party. These religious organisations actively participate in politics by supporting political candidates and promoting laws that reflect their moral convictions, such as prohibitions on abortion or same-sex marriages. This illustrates how religious convictions can actively influence political goals and consequences. It should be noted that the methods of theological influence on politics can vary greatly. The most common of these is the strengthening of the church's influence on political bodies, such as legislatures, executive branches, and local governments.

Influence through the religious masses is also significant. In this case, the emphasis is placed on those societal groups that are most interested in transforming this social reality. However, a political system based on democratic principles denies absolutist social perspectives, which are primarily associated with religion. Drawing analogies between the theologisation of politics and the politicisation of religion, it is important to underline that in practice, these two mechanisms are so intertwined that distinguishing them can be challenging.

The question of the interplay between politics and religion gains particular importance in modern conditions. The inseparable connection is explained by the fact that religion has long been considered a crucial tool for maintaining and acquiring power. To achieve this goal, political forces cannot rely solely on coercion or physical force. The impact on people's spirituality, specifically ideological manipulation of their consciousness and behaviour, plays a crucial role. In this regard, the church and religion have a crucial influence. Religion justifies any form of power and serves to strengthen that power, invoking the unshakable authority of a higher divine power (Kieliszek, 2024).

Today, moral principles are being popularised among the public, and the sphere of influence of moral aspects is expanding. The key mission of moral education is to shape a person's value consciousness and help build relationships with others and one's self. Morality is an integral component of spirituality (Spytska, 2023). In contemporary society, the relationship between religion and politics has taken on new contours. It is worth noting that even internal conflicts within the church often have political undercurrents. This is evident, for instance, in "liberation theology" and unconventional beliefs (such as Baha'ism, Vaishnavism, and occultism) that have emerged in recent years. This is why questions related to the integration of politics and religion have gained special relevance in today's conditions. This is influenced by the features of current political processes and the role of the church in them. It is also worth mentioning that in modern conditions, it is quite challenging to distinguish between political and religious factors. The religious aspect itself has a positive dynamic and various forms of expression. Primarily, there is a noticeable rise in fundamentalists, who are often equated with right-conservative forces. For example, such phenomena can be observed in Islam (the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, inter-Arab conflicts).

In this study, it is worth indicating the fact that religion considers and covers almost all acute social modern problems. Thus, experts in the field of religion can offer their own methods for addressing demographic or environmental problems. The increasing influence of religious aspects in politics can also be observed from the fact that prominent religious figures have been nominated for important government positions in recent times. There are also manifestations of the growing influence of religious movements and organisations on global politics.

The role of these associations in the public political system has changed, with religious organisations becoming equal components within political processes (Beekers, 2020). Several factors need to be considered when examining the aspects of the interplay between religion and politics. This includes the features of public consciousness, the development of political culture, and the religiosity of society. The church, as an institution in the political system of society, encompasses all mechanisms belonging to social organisation (Bartolini, Chris, MacKian, and Pile, 2017.). This accounts for the close relationship between politics and religion in modern conditions.

## Problems of Interaction of Religion and Politics in Modern Kazakhstan

Today, religion plays a key role in shaping international relations, domestic policy, and overall state stability. However, it is essential not to overlook the negative aspects of religious life in this research. In modern Republic of Kazakhstan, there is a unique societal consensus and interethnic unity. The fundamental principles of these concepts have been accompanied by legislation since the early days of the sovereign republic. Since gaining independence, Kazakhstan has needed to formulate its own policy in the religious field. Considering that Kazakhstan is not a predominantly Muslim country and is home to numerous representatives of other faiths, the state has had to implement an inclusive policy that addresses the needs of all religious groups and the population. According to available data, there are more than 120 nationalities in the Republic of Kazakhstan, with over 3000 registered religious associations covering 18 denominations (Mokhoathi, 2017). These statistics are clearly illustrated in Figure 1.

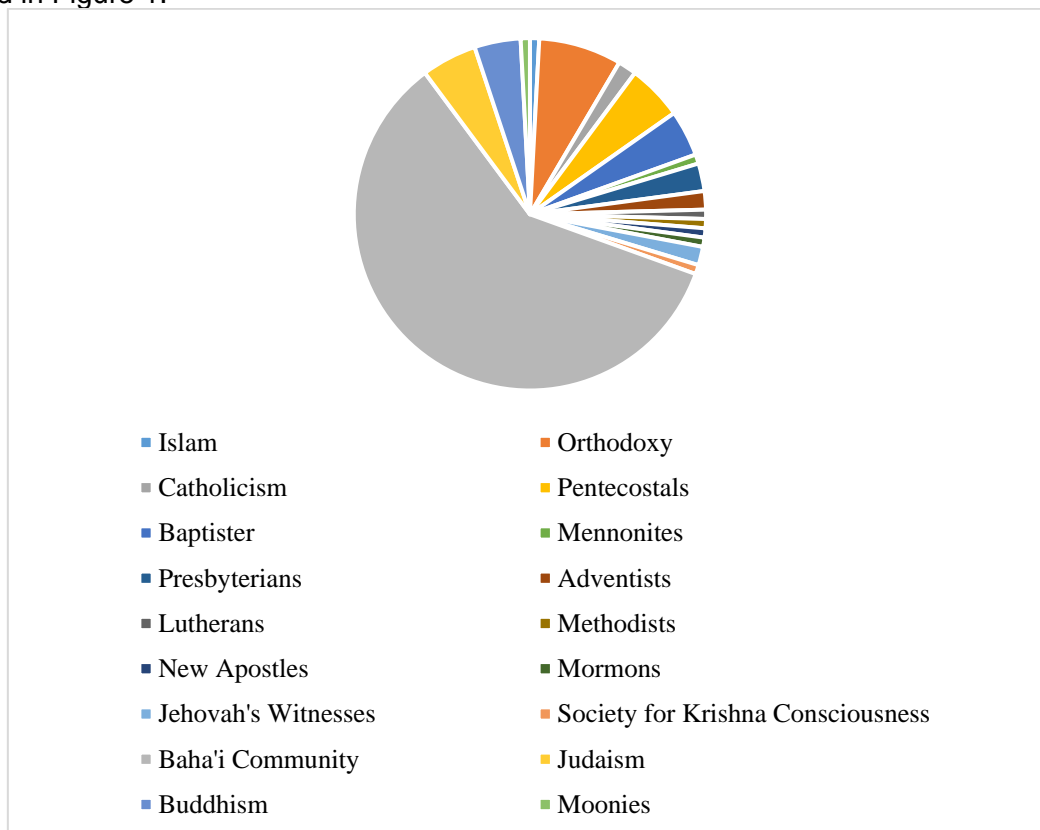


Figure 1. Religious denominations in Kazakhstan  
Source: (Lukpanov, 2012; Altaikyzy, 2019).

It is necessary to note that the policy in the field of religion has developed gradually in Kazakhstan since gaining independence. It is essential to mention that a significant part of the efforts has been directed towards informative and explanatory work with the population to identify any destructive trends in religion. Alongside this, the correct external religious policy has played a crucial role in ensuring Kazakhstan's national security. It has also had a positive impact on strengthening regional and global stability, serving as a foundation for improving relations and cooperation with other countries. In 2020, a special plan for implementing the state policy in the religious field in Kazakhstan for 2021-2023 was approved, focusing on supporting secular principles in society and ensuring interfaith harmony and stability in Kazakh society (Walach, 2017).

Based on recent studies and publications, it can be observed that modern citizens of Kazakhstan are informed about the activities of government agencies in the religious field, with over 60% of the population being aware. However, only 40% of the population takes a specific interest in this issue (Martyshyn, 2019). Moreover, one-tenth of the population considers the state policy in the religious field to be incorrect and does not support it. The awareness of the population on matters related to



religious policy becomes significant. According to existing surveys, the majority of Kazakhstan's citizens perceive the religious situation in their place of residence and in the country as being favourable. However, more than 35% of respondents' report that they lack information about the religious situation and have an abstract understanding thereof (Kaluha, 2021). In general, it can be stated that 65% of respondents are informed about matters related to the religious situation.

The new 21st century can be characterised as a manifestation of religious revival and the establishment of religious consciousness, particularly Islamic. Consequently, the relevance of the issue regarding the interplay between religion and politics in the modern world has significantly increased. In some studies, religion and politics are even juxtaposed, with religion being highly regarded, while the significance and role of political processes in public life decrease (Lukpanov, 2012; Altaikyzy, 2019; Gauthier & Martikainen, 2020; Beekers, 2020). However, this study does not support such an opinion since the previous sections have demonstrated the existence of a close relationship between politics and religion since ancient periods of societal development. Both of these categories are essentially social and historical phenomena. These phenomena can be related as transcendental and factual aspects of human existence. Over a relatively short period, Kazakhstan has overcome numerous mistakes and their consequences made in earlier periods (Schavrina, 2019; Caputo & Hart, 2019). The period of independence has provided an opportunity to restore the original religion and culture of the populations residing here. Relations between politics and religion have been established through relevant legislative and political acts. This meant that the relationship between the state and religion is now being built on different principles (Pirnazarov, 2020):

- the state and religion, acting separately, are full-fledged partners in real life;
- the government is separated from religion and its associations;
- no religion can be established as mandatory or state-mandated.

Meanwhile, concerning the full realisation of freedom of conscience for all citizens of the country, interethnic and interreligious relations, political power attached great importance in practical aspects. The government formulates policies that create real opportunities to lead personal lives without hindrance for both individuals and communities. In practice, the state has long been guided by the principles of religious freedom, justice, and equality. It is necessary to note that such a policy has contributed to the formation of relationships of mutual tolerance and respect in society, as well as among numerous religious organizations. Thus, the period of Kazakhstan's independence is characterized by the strengthening of the social position of religion in society. Regarding changes in the field of religion, some of them can be noted (Van Niekerk, 2018):

1. There are numerous religious denominations and places of worship – churches, temples, mosques, and educational religious institutions.
2. After a long period, the residents of Kazakhstan began to realise themselves as part of the believers of the rest of the world.
3. Real opportunities have been created for individuals and associations to engage in free religious life.
4. In Kazakhstani society, the authority of religion, including Islam, has considerably increased, leading to a change in public opinion in its favour.
5. All conditions have been created for the further development of a kind of optimal model of state-religious relations in Kazakhstan.
6. Relations with global religious centres such as Mecca and Jerusalem have been properly established.
7. An inclination towards democracy, justice, freedom, tolerance, and the principles of mutual understanding is evident.

The government relates to religion through its external and internal functions. The current character of social development presupposes a close interconnection between religion and politics, which outlines the content of their relationship. Religion and politics can be considered independent





components of social life, as those areas that have their specific meaning, forms of manifestation, and principles with characteristic features (Palmer & Siegler, 2017; Nicolaidis, 2020). Existing together, they have significant importance in organising human life and society at any time. The interconnection between religion and political aspects has undergone significant transformation during the period of Kazakhstan's independence. It is also important to emphasise that the complex diversity of the religious field was evident from the outset.

## Conclusions

Having analysed the existing problems in the religious-political system of Kazakhstan caused by the apparent insufficient development of this issue, it can be concluded that for the development of religion as a factor in societal spirituality, certain stages are necessary. These stages include the introduction of innovative methodologies into the political sphere and a qualitative determination of the criteria for the influence of religion on political processes. It was revealed that Kazakhstan's religious policy influences the ongoing political processes. It was also determined that such mechanisms can be a factor in Kazakhstan's sustainable development because religion and spirituality significantly impact the country's political sphere and, consequently, the overall economy.

Kazakhstan, with its unique historical, cultural conditions, the originality of social development, and the specificity of the religious sphere, implements its own model of state-confessional relations recognised by the global community. Normative legal acts are adopted by government authorities, and programmes and plans for regulating religious activities are developed; however, the implementation of the state's strategy for promoting secular values is not very noticeable. The influence of religion has considerably increased in recent times, not only on the international stage but also in the domestic policies of various countries, particularly in the concept of democratic processes. This is evident in defending the right to one's own opinion and presentation of family, moral, and social norms, and in the effort to ensure the protection of democratic values, institutions, and mechanisms.

The main task of today's economy is comprehensive support for all components that can quickly adapt to changing socio-economic conditions. Therefore, the current task of the government is to provide additional support to the religious sector, ensuring a high level of spiritual stability.

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